

Message Text

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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN CHAMBER OF LABOR ELECTION RESULTS

REF: VIENNA A-446 DATED SEP. 27, 1974

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

SUMMARY: RESULTS OF AUSTRIAN CHAMBERS OF LABOR ELECTIONS HAVE DASHED SOCIALISTS' HOPES THAT ENFRANCHISEMENT OF FOREIGN WORKERS WOULD BRING SOCIALIST GAINS AND ARREST STEADY ACCRETION SINCE 1949 OF SUPPORT FOR RIVAL PEOPLE'S PARTY LISTS. SOCIALIST'S PERCENTAGE OF VOTE FELL TO A POSTWAR LOW; PEOPLE'S PARTY'S ROSE TO NEW HIGH. EMBASSY AGREES WITH PM KREISKY AND PEOPLE'S PARTY LABOR LEAGUE LEADER MOCK THAT RESULTS ARE NOT NECESSARILY INDICATIVE OF NATIONAL POLITICAL TREND, BUT BELIEVES THEY COULD HAVE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT. END SUMMARY

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1. UNOFFICIAL BUT NEARLY COMPLETE RETURNS FROM

SEPTEMBER 29-30 ELECTIONS FOR 810 SEATS IN AUSTRIA'S NINE PROVINCIAL CHAMBERS OF LABOR (SEE REFAIR) INDICATE SURPRISINGLY STRONG GAINS FOR CONSERVATIVE PEOPLE'S PARTY LISTS AND EQUALLY SURPRISING LOSSES FOR SOCIALIST LISTS. APPROXIMATELY 200,000 NEWLY ENFRANCHISED FOREIGN WORKERS WERE ELIGIBLE FOR FIRST TIME TO VOTE IN 1974. SOCIALISTS HAD HOPED THAT MOST FOREIGNERS WOULD VOTE SOCIALIST AND THUS ARREST STEADY GAINS PEOPLE'S PARTY HAD MADE SINCE WAR AND ALSO RETURN SOCIALISTS TO CONTROL OF VORARLBERG PROVINCIAL CHAMBER. INSTEAD, SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE'S PARTY LISTS INCREASED FROM 23.5 PERCENT TO 29.4 PERCENT OF TOTAL VOTE. NUMBER OF PEOPLE'S PARTY SEATS INCREASED FROM 195 TO 241, AND PEOPLE'S PARTY GAINED AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN VORARLBERG AT EXPENSE OF BHTH FREEDOM PARTY AND SOCIALISTS. NATIONWIDE, SUPPORT FOR SOCIALIST LISTS DROPPED TO POSTWAR LOW OF 63 PERCENT, VERSUS 68.3 PERCENT IN 1969 AND PREVIOUS LOW OF 64.4 PERCENT IN 1949. NUMBER OF SOCIALIST SEATS DROPPED FROM 560 TO 529.

2. THERE WERE NEARLY 300,000 MORE WORKERS ELIGIBLE TO VOTE THAN IN 1969; NEARLY 200,000 MORE VOTES WERE CAST. NATIONWIDE, LISTS OF EACH PARTY RECEIVED MORE VOTES THAN IN 1969 (IF VOTES FOR THE TWO COMMUNIST LISTS ARE COMBINED) BUT DECLINES IN VOTE FOR FREEDOM PARTY LISTS IN VORARLBERG, SALZBURG AND STEIERMARK PROVINCES NEARLY OFFSET THAT PARTY'S GAINS ELSEWHERE. FREEDOM PARTY'S SHARE OF ALL VOTES DECLINED ONLY FROM 4.9 TO 4.7 PERCENT BUT IT LOST 11 OF ITS 40 SEATS. COMMUNIST PARTY LOST ONE OF ITS 11 SEATS; COMMUNIST SPLINTER GROUP TOOK ONE. INDEPENDENTS LOST FOUR SEATS THEY HAD HELD.

3. SOCIALIST PRIME MINISTER KREISKY SAID THAT ELECTION RESULTS CANNOT BE INTERPRETED AS INDICATIVE OF POLITICAL TREND IN AUSTRIA. ALOIS MOCK, HEAD OF VICTORIOUS LABOR LEAGUE OF PEOPLE'S PARTY, SAID SAME. OTHER SOCIALIST LEADERS HAVE NOT HIDDEN THEIR DISAPPOINTMENT AND SOME HAVE AGREED WITH THEIR POLITICAL OPPONENTS THAT VOTE WAS WARNING TO SOCIALISTS, ESPECIALLY ON INFLATION ISSUE THAT DOMINATED CAMPAIGN DISCUSSIONS. PEOPLE'S LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PARTY SPOKESMEN, GEARING UP FOR PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS IN VORARLBERG AND STEIERMARK ON OCTOBER 20, AND WITH EYE TO NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN 1975, SAW HOPEFUL SIGNS IN RESULTS. END UNCLASSIFIED

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4. COMMENT. EMBASSY IS NOT INCLINED TO FORESEE ANY

PROBABLE CORRELATION BETWEEN PARTY FORTUNES IN
CHAMBER OF LABOR ELECTIONS AND IN FORTHCOMING PROVINCIAL
OR MORE DISTANT NATIONAL ELECTIONS SINCE SPECIFIC
CORRELATIONS WERE LACKING IN PAST. PEOPLE'S PARTY SEEMS
TO HAVE CONTINUED TO BENEFIT FROM GREATER RELATIVE GROWTH
OF WHITE-COLLAR SEGMENT OF LABOR FORCE AS WELL AS
SUPPORT OF FOREIGN WORKERS WHO, IN ANY CASE, WILL NOT
VOTE IN POLITICAL ELECTIONS. RESULTS NEVERTHELESS PROVIDE
HELPFUL PSYCHOLOGICAL BOOST FOR PEOPLE'S PARTY CADRE
AND UNDOUBTEDLY WILL LEAD TO SOME-POSSIBLY TIMELY--SOUL
SEARCHING AMONG SOCIALISTS. APPARENT FAILURE OF
FOREIGN WORKERS TO RALLY TO SOCIALIST BANNER SEEMS TO
HAVE SURPRISED ALL AUSTRIANS, PROBABLY MORE THAN IT
SHOULD HAVE WHEN ONE REFLECTS UPON FACT MOST WERE FROM
YUGOSLAVIA AND UPON PROBABLE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND
INDIVIDUAL MOTIVES THAT LED YUGOSLAVS TO SEEK EMPLOYMENT
IN AUSTRIA. END COMMENT

END LIMITED OFFICIAL USE. HUMES

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